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Vol. I

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The Boy Bicycle Scouts; OR, ON THE WHEEL Among the Redskins.

By PAUL BRADDON.



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THE BOY BICYCLE SCOUTS;

OR,

On the Wheel Among the Redskins.

A THRILLING STORY OF THE WILD WEST COUNTRY.

By PAUL BRADDON,

Author of "The Prairie Post Boy; or, The Scalp Hunters of Apache Land," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY BICYCLE SCOUTS ON A TRAIL.

NOISELESSLY, like things of silent life, through the dusky shadows glided two indistinct, and in the semi-light, seemingly weird, uncanny objects.

Above two human heads, higher than the stature of man. Below two globes—two circles—in revolution so swift that the fine metallic spokes were blurred and blended until each whirling sphere seemed a solid wheel.

"Hist!" One of the bicycle riders uttered the words to his companion, and as soon as possible, both checked the swift flight of their flying wheels.

The bicyclists were both mere lads—boys of seventeen and eighteen.

The elder—Dick Dare—was the one who uttered the admonition of warning above recorded.

"What is it, Dick?" asked Tom Tracy.

"I am sure I heard a cry for help. Only once it sounded, and then all was still."

"I fancied I heard something, but I thought it must have been the howl of a wolf."

"No. I am quite sure that I caught the words 'Help! Help!'"

The young wheelman had stopped by the time the last remark was made.

The scene was wild and picturesque.

The valley of the Powder river, in the Yellowstone country, lay under the shadows. It was a wonderland, there were grand valleys, magnificent mountains, vast plains.

Volcanic rocks of strange-weird shape and painted by the wonderful brush of nature's supreme artist, showed fantastically on the heights.

To the southward were the then unexplored, and almost unknown regions of the Black Hills, the land of Indian secrets and aboriginal mysteries.

The Sioux were the masters of the country, and sitting Bull, the great war-chief, declared at the council fires of his tribe that the pale faces should never enter the goodly hunting grounds.

But the two boy wheelmen were, nevertheless, almost in the heart of the Sioux country, where probably few, if any white men had ever set foot, since the beginning.

The Sioux war was in progress.

The redskins had defied the power of the national government to open up or possess the Black Hills.

General Custer, the dashing dragoon, was marching with his men to enforce the edict of the government.

The column had started from Fort Lincoln and proceeded due west toward the Yellowstone river.

With the little army went Dick Dare and Tom Tracy, the young wheelmen who were already famous as the Boy Bicycle Scouts.

They had performed daring and heroic services a year previously, during the Sioux outbreak, and General Custer had been glad to enlist the services of the two daring lads.

Dick and Tom were cousins, and both were orphans with a small fortune and a most indulgent guardian—an old hunter and ex-army scout who was their affectionate uncle.

Captain Jerry Grindle delighted in the two boys' daring adventures, and he was very proud of them too.

An Indian fighter himself, he thought no fame could be greater than that his nephews and wards were gaining as the boy bicycle scouts.

Dick and Tom were silent for a moment or so after the last speech was made.

But Tom was reiterating his conviction that he had heard a cry for help when it came again.

Yes. That time there could be no doubt as to the nature of the outcry.

"Help! help! help!"

A clear, young voice it was—the boyish intonations told that age had not set its weight upon its owner.

"Look there? Fire! fire!" cried Tom, in low, excited tones.

He pointed westward, and following with his glances the direction indicated Dick saw a red glow above the tops of the bushes in an adjacent belt of timber.

"What can it mean?" said Dick.

"You remember the moccasin trail?"

"Yes. The trail of the war party of Sioux."

"Which we discovered at the water course."

"A mile back?"

"Certainly. Well, I suspect the redskins are in yonder timber, and the fire causes me to think that the red demons may have some white captive bound to the torture stake."

"Tom, I am with you to help the boy who just shouted for help."

"All right."

As Tom spoke he suddenly slipped from his wheel and added in an intense whisper:

"Down, Dick, down!"

Dick was on the ground beside his wheel, while yet the sound of the whisper was in his ears.

"Over with your wheel!" further directed Tom as he placed his bicycle flat upon the plain.

Dick deposited his wheel in the same fashion, and the young bicycle scouts crouched side by side.

They saw two human forms approaching, and it was the discovery of them which Tom first made that called forth his warning.

The two young wheelmen were armed with improved repeating rifles, revolvers, hunting knives, and they had plenty of ammunition.

They carried their rifles slung to their shoulders, but they now slipped them off and held them ready for immediate use.

There was just one chance in a hundred that the two men who were approaching would pass without discovering them.

But if they were discovered? Ah! In that case the silent plain would become the scene of a desperate fight.

And of all things the boy bicycle scouts wished to avoid a conflict—wished to escape discovery.

They had ventured a long way from General Custer's force, on scouting service, and discovery by enemies meant that they would, almost certainly, be cut off from a retreat to the army.

If captured a cruel fate was sure to befall them.

The Sioux were always merciless to the whites, and just now they were particularly incensed against the whites.

Moreover, the young wheelmen were supremely anxious to get back to General Custer's lines because they had important news to communicate.

A moment after Tom and Dick saw the two forms coming, the former said:

"Those men are not Indians."

"No."

"They are white men."

"As I live you are right."

"Hush!"

Just then the two men began to talk.

They were now so near the two boy scouts of the wheel, that the latter experienced no difficulty in catching their words.

The first speaker said:

"Ford Arden is done for."

"Yes," came the reply.

"And but one more life stands in your pathway to the goal of gold."

"And that is a frail life."

"Yes, only a young girl, with no one to protect her."

"She shall be swept from my trail to fortune, like chaff before the wind."

"But how am I to know her?"

"By this."

The boys saw something pass between the two men.

"Ah!" then said one. "This is a photograph?"

"Yes. The picture of Mollie Arden, Ford Arden's sister."

"Good."

A moment and the two men passed so close to the two bicycle scouts, beside their wheels, that they saw their faces.

One was a tall, white-haired, clean-shaven man with a thin, eager face and a cast of countenance that reminded one of a hawk or some other bird of prey.

It was this man who had given the other the photograph of the doomed girl.

The other was a sturdy, thick-set fellow, with a bushy beard and a curious droop in the lid of the left eye that kept it almost shut.

He was a desperate-looking ruffian, clad in half Indian costume, and armed to the teeth.

His companion of the snowy locks was, on the contrary, attired in a suit of genteel black. He wore a white stock and a high vest of ministerial cut.

His air was solemn, sedate, quiet, and yet in his small, deeply-set eyes there was a sleeping light suggestive of strong passions held in check and fierce purposes well hidden.

"A singular couple," said Dick Dare, drawing a deep breath of relief.

The two men had passed.

Dick and Tom had not been seen.

A moment subsequently the men, who were evidently conspirators of the border, were out of sight.

Then the bicycle scouts righted their wheels and mounted them.

"Now to see if we can help him who appealed for assistance," said Tom.

"Yes. Forward!"

The wheels began to revolve.

In a brief space the bicyclists entered the wood, which was open in character, so that they found it easy to guide their wheels between the trees.

Presently Dick said, in a whisper:

"I have been trying to place the bearded ruffian ever since he passed us, and I have just hit upon his name."

"Who is he?" Tom asked.

"Miles Delmart, the renegade."

"What! Sitting Bull's white lieutenant?"

"The same blood-thirsty villain, who is the sworn foe of his own race."

"And the other?"

"I do not know him."

"Nor I."

Peering through a thicket which they presently reached, the boy bicycle scouts saw a thrilling sight.

The next moment a chorus of savage yells rang in their ears.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY BICYCLE SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE.

THE scene the two boy bicycle scouts suddenly had revealed to them through the leafy canopy of the thicket was a startling one.

The wild and thrilling chorus of yells that rung in their ears were uttered by a score of savages.

They were in a little open glade of the forest.

All around the tree wall framed in the space.

In the center of the glade a stake, freshly cut, was set up, and to it was bound a young and handsome white boy.

He was clad in a suit of army blue.

The savages—who were all Sitting Bull's warriors—had fired the dry brush which was heaped about the young captive.

The red fiends circled around the doomed boy in the terrible scalp dance.

Like a band of fiends they looked in the lurid glare of the torture-fire.

The boy bicycle scouts recognized among the band one of the leading Sioux warriors.

He was Rain-In-The-Face, the most blood-thirsty of the Sioux.

"We must make a try to save that poor boy," said Dick, and his eyes flashed.

"Yes. Let's try the 'Buffalo demon' dodge. You know it worked well with the Indians we met in Black Canyon?"

"All right."

In a moment each lad drew forth from a leather bag, strapped behind on the wheel-seat, the head of a buffalo.

Each head consisted only of the skin and horns with reed frame work, inside and hollow, so as to admit a head of ordinary size.

The boys had captured the strangely prepared buffalo heads, in the Apache country, where they had formed a part of the belongings of a "great medicine man."

Slipping on the buffalo heads and looking through the eye holes, the boys drew their revolvers and were ready for action.

They were bent upon a most desperate undertaking—to snatch the white captive from his foes.

But they relied upon the terror with which they hoped their startling appearance might strike the redskins.

The boy wheelmen knew the redskins had never seen a bicycle.

They also thought the buffalo heads they wore would serve to appeal to the superstition of the Sioux.

That tribe almost worships the bison, and will only kill him at certain seasons.

"Now from the fund of information which they had gleaned from their uncle and guardian regarding the customs of the Sioux, the boys knew that buffalo killing was just then out of season with the reds.

"Ready, Tom?"

"Yes."

"When I give the word, go."

"All right."

"Fire as you advance."

"Yes. We have got to give the reds the greatest surprise of their lives or lose our scalps."

"And fail to save the white boy."

"No more delay! In a moment the cruel flames will reach him!"

"Yes, now!"

The ensuing moment the two strange objects, with the heads of buffaloes mounted on bicycles, dashed forward at full speed among the redskins straight for the white boy bound to the stake.

As they charged they shouted, or rather roared, and at the same time sent forth a tremendous fusillade from their weapons.

Bang.

Bang.

Bang.

Shot followed shot, in such rapid succession that it seemed as if a large force instead of merely two boys had opened fire.

But the boys' shots did execution.

Several redskins fell.

At the sight of the most astounding apparitions they had ever beheld, the Sioux fled.

"Bad medicine!"

"Manito save the Sioux!"

Such were the shouts they uttered.

The boys understood the Sioux language, and so they knew what was said.

"Whoop! Whoop! Whoop!" the two young heroes shouted.

They sent their wheels spinning right through the flames to the prisoner at the stake.

How they did it they could scarcely have told afterward, so great was the excitement of the moment.

But almost instantly Dick and Tom had cut the young captive loose from the stake.

Then riding side by side, each grasped one of his arms, and carrying him between them thus, they sped away.

At full speed they went.

Through the trees they sped.

Soon they were clear of the timber.

Then the open plain lay before them.

Away they went.

And just then they saw the redskins break out of the timber in the rear.

Rain-in-the-Face came first.

It seemed that he was urging his red warriors on in the chase.

The crafty chief probably suspected the character of the strange-looking beings who had carried off the prisoner.

"Where now?" cried Tom.

"To the south."

"On for General Custer's army?"

"Yes."

The boy they had rescued uttered a terrible groan.

"Are you wounded?"

Tom asked the question with tender solicitude.

"Unto death."

"Say not so."

"It is true."

"Poor fellow!"

"You come from General Custer?"

"Yes."

"Then thank heaven we have met. Stop. Let me down."

"But the Indians?"

"They have turned back," said the wounded boy.

The young wheelmen now saw this was so, and they were much surprised.

Immediately they halted.

The wounded boy was tenderly placed on the ground.

"My name is Arden—Ford Arden—Oh, Heaven! The wound in my breast!"

He panted for a moment.

The blood came from his mouth.

The boy wheelmen saw he was dying.

But they were powerless to do more than they did.

Dick held his head tenderly.

The doomed boy gasped with his last breath:

"The sealed dispatch in my bosom—for General Custer—a great

secret—Mollie, my sister—save her from Satterlee and the renegades."

"He is dead."

Dick spoke the words solemnly.

It was a moment later.

"Open his jacket," directed Dick.

"I will."

Tom Tracy did as he said.

In the bosom of the poor boy he found a sealed package.

It was stained with the life blood of the dead lad, and bound about with buckskin.

"We must carry the dispatch," said Dick.

"To General Custer?"

"Yes."

"Who can it be from?"

"That is a mystery."

"There are no soldiers in the north?"

"No."

"And no fort north of Fort Lincoln?"

"No."

"Well, we must keep the package as we have found it."

"Certainly, until we give it into the hands of General Custer."

"To open it would, in my opinion, be to prove unworthy of the trust the dead boy has reposed in us."

"I think so, too."

"I see nothing more of the reds."

"Neither do I."

"It's very strange."

"Yes."

"Let's bury the dead boy."

"Certainly."

"We can use our hunting knives to dig the grave."

The boys did so.

They wrapped the boy in one of the blankets and placed him in the shallow tomb.

Having carefully covered it they rode on.

Still they wondered why the redskins had so suddenly abandoned the pursuit of them.

Yet the mystery of the sealed dispatch perplexed them.

And they fell to wondering if they had not stumbled upon a dark conspiracy of the border.

"The dead boy spoke of his sister," said Dick.

"Yes."

"He called her Mollie."

"True."

"And he mentioned Satterlee."

"And the renegade."

"Do you think by the *renegade* he meant Miles Delmart?"

"Yes."

"And I."

"I am also of the opinion that the white-haired, sleek, ministerial-looking villain whom we saw in company with Delmart is Satterlee."

"I think you are right."

"Tom?"

"Well, Dick?"

"The dead boy implored us to save his sister."

"He did."

"Do you mean to do it?"

"If I can."

"Give me your hand. It's my idea Mollie Arden is to be placed in deadly peril at the hands of Miles Delmart, the renegade, and that Satterlee is urging him on," replied Tom.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRATAGEM OF THE RENEGADE.

"I FULLY agree with you," replied the other.

"We know nothing about Mollie Arden or the scheme of her enemies. But, for all that, some way I feel deep interest in her welfare."

"And I."

"Her dead brother lost his life in the service of General Custer."

"Yes, as the carrier of the general's sealed dispatch."

"And therefore I am confident our commander will be willing that we should serve the dead boy's sister."

"Yes."

"But first we must reach the army."

"The important news we have demands that it should be our first consideration so to do."

"And then the sealed package—the dead boy's dispatch."

"Oh, yes. It may be, and probably is, of the highest importance."

"And in its delivery there should be no delay."

"No."

"Then on. Let the wheels spin."

"I feel perhaps we are riding to save an army."

"So do I."

On, on, went the two boy bicycle scouts at full speed.

They rode bicycles of the best make.

Their wheels were provided with every improvement.

The boys were experts.

There were no trick riders of the wheel that could surpass them.

And, while they rode on, a thrilling scene was in progress in the timber, to which the Indians had suddenly retired, after starting to pursue them.

All at once the redskins had been called back.

The man who called them was Miles Delmart, the renegade.

When he passed the two bicycle scouts, in company with the white-haired man, he had gone a short distance only.

Then, having seen his companion mounted on a fine horse which an Indian had in waiting for him, and watched him ride southward, with the Indian Delmart turned back.

Sitting Bull's lieutenant went toward the glade where Ford Arden had been bound to the stake.

"I have just reflected that—in all probability—the young spy the warriors are about to burn at the stake may carry the message Scarface was seen writing by Red Panther."

Thus muttered the renegade.

He reached the dell.

It was deserted.

When he saw the prisoner was no longer at the stake Delmart uttered a yell.

It was a cry of rage.

"Has he escaped?" he uttered.

"Fool that I was not to have had him closely searched for the message Scarface may have given him!"

He heard the shouts of the redskins, whom Rain-in-the-Face had now rallied in pursuit of the boy bicycle scouts.

"Ha! The captive is running for his life! The warriors will retake him?"

The renegade rushed in the direction whence the yells of the Sioux came.

He reached the edge of the timber.

Then he suddenly paused!

And why?

Because, at that moment, he had caught sight of the boy bicycle scouts.

Delmart started back.

"Ha! The demons of the buffalo heads! The wonder of which the Indian scouts told some days ago," he said.

"But stay. Ah! I see it all! They are white boys mounted on bicycles, and grotesquely disguised."

Delmart saw the boys were making wonderful speed.

He was a cunning villain, and he decided that, on foot, his redskins could not overtake the fugitives with the escaped captive.

Instantly, Delmart thought of a stratagem.

It was worthy of his master—old Sitting Bull himself.

Immediately, Delmart shouted:

"Come back, warriors!"

Thrice his command was repeated.

Then the redskins fell back.

Delmart led them into the woods.

"Why does the white chief call us back from the trail of those who have carried off the captive?" demanded one of the redskins.

He was Rain-in-the-face.

The truth was, the chief was jealous of the favor Delmart the renegade had won with Sitting Bull.

"I will explain all to my red brother."

Delmart answered in tones meant to conciliate.

"Say on."

"You know the Scarface?"

"Yes. The white medicine man."

"He whom Sitting Bull has kept a prisoner, but treated as kindly as possible, because of his great medical skill."

"Yes."

"Well, I suspect he gave the white boy who has escaped from the stake a 'talking paper.'"

"Ah! Now were you wrong not to have had the white boy stripped?"

"Yes."

"But we must recapture him."

"Then why call us back? Again I demand to know?"

"Because the riders of the wheels are swift. They can outrun the Sioux."

"Ha! The warriors begin to see."

"We must get our ponies."

"And then?"

"Go on through the woods."

"Good! Woh! We will head off the pale-faces and take their scalps."

"That's my idea."

"The pale-face brother is a great chief."

"Thanks."

The ponies of the Indians had been tethered in a grassy valley of the wood.

It was half a mile distant.

Delmart gave orders for the band to proceed at once to the horses.

They were nearly all about setting off, when an interruption came.

A warrior who had remained watching the boy bicycle scouts at the edge of the timber rushed up.

"What now, Red Panther?"

Delmart asked the question eagerly.

"The buffalo demons are burying the white prisoner they took from the stake."

"Ha! then he is dead!"

"The bullet Red Panther sent into him before we captured him has done its work."

"Well, we will get the horses."

"And then?" asked Rain-in-the-Face.

"Then we'll dig up the dead."

"You think that if he had the talking paper it may yet be on him?"

"Possibly."

The party hastened to the valley in which the ponies were.

The entire band mounted.

Presently they were riding to the place on the plains where the boy wheelmen had buried Ford Arden.

Reaching the grave, the Indians dug up the body.

They stripped it, but found not the sealed dispatches.

It was really a message from "Scar Face," as the Indians called the great white medicine man who was Sitting Bull's captive.

The prisoner had given it to young Arden, and charged him on his life to deliver it to General Custer.

Young Arden had been captured by Sitting Bull.

In the village of the Sioux chief the boy and "Scarface" had met.

The latter had cut the cords that bound Arden and set him free.

The boy had ridden a fleet Indian pony from the Sioux village.

But he had been pursued.

His pony, many miles from the Indian village, broke his leg in a dog-hole.

Then the brave lad, with the message from General Custer in his bosom, pressed on, on foot.

But his mounted pursuers had run him down at last, and taken him into the glade to burn him at the stake.

He had been searched.

But a fortunate chance, which might indeed have been an interposition of Providence, prevented the sealed dispatch falling into the hands of his foes.

It was well concealed in the lining of his jacket.

When Delmart and his warriors found that there was no "talking paper" on the dead body of their recent captive, the renegade said:

"I suspect the wheelmen have taken Scarface's message. We must capture them. The talking paper may reveal the great secret of the Black Hills."

"Wah," grunted Rain-in-the-face.

Then the Indians took the trail of the two brave lads who were riding for General Custer's army.
 The boys were sighted some two hours subsequently.
 Then the renegade said:
 "Now we will take to the woods, make a detour, and head off and surprise the wheel riders."
 "Good!" assented Rain-in-the-face.
 The other warriors grunted an approval.
 Then the band entered an adjacent strip of timber.
 It was southward.
 In that direction the boys were going.
 The savages felt sure of the capture of the young bicycle scouts.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE CABIN OF THE MISSIONARY.

THE young wheelmen were still speeding on under the moonlight near the long stretch of timber mentioned.
 Suddenly a chorus of fierce yells broke the stillness of the night.
 Then out of the timber, directly ahead of the young bicyclists, dashed Delmart, the renegade, and his band.
 The boy wheelmen were taken completely by surprise.
 They knew, however, that it would be death to stop.
 So, setting their teeth firmly, they dashed on right at the Indians.
 We have said that they were splendid wheelmen—wonderful experts, trick riders without equal.
 Now, they did not need their hands to guide their wheels.
 Still keeping the pedals going with their feet, and crouching over the great flying wheels, that glittered like circles of silver in the moonlight, they leveled their rifles.
 "Crack! Crack! Crack!"
 "Crack! Crack! Crack!"
 The volley they sent hurtling from the death-dealing weapons was a shower of doom.
 "Crack! Crack! Crack!"
 In each of the repeating weapons of the boy bicycle scout there were sixteen bullets.
 The rifles were veritable magazines of death.
 The redskins tumbled from their saddles.
 The ponies they bestrode were frightened at the sight of the flying burnished wheels and the grotesque riders.
 The boy wheelmen yet wore the buffalo heads.
 They had a two-fold purpose in so doing.
 The heads were impervious to bullets, and so would act as protectors to their skulls.
 At the same time they wished their appearance to strike terror to the hearts of any enemies they might meet.
 Delmart had counted surely on making the boy wheelmen captives at this point.
 But he was wonderfully disappointed.
 As the Indian ponies scampered away on all sides, snorting in fright, the boy wheelmen dashed straight through the ranks of their red foemen.
 Not for an instant were they halted.
 Then on and on again.
 But they were pursued by the mounted Indians.
 Then ensued a thrilling race.
 It was the bicycles against the horses.
 The Indian ponies are swift footed, and almost tireless, being inured to make very long journeys.
 The boy wheelmen were in superb training, and fit to race, on the wheel, for their lives.
 Never before had they made such a showing, in point of speed.
 The character of the plains favored them, and well they held their own.
 As long as the plains remained smooth they doubted not that they could continue so to do.
 The brave boys had but one fear.
 That was that the surface might become too rough for speed, or that they might run into prairie dog holes.
 For the latter they kept a sharp lookout.
 Putting on a spurt the boys gained a little on the Indians.
 Some miles the race had continued when all at once the bicycle racers checked their wheels.
 Before them was a strange plateau.
 It was an extensive plain, seamed and split in every direction.
 Apparently volcanic action, in some long years past, had created the strange lava strewn tract.
 The boys' faces turned blank of expression.
 They knew they could not cross that broken plain.
 To the right was the woods.
 Therein lay their only chance now.
 "To the woods!" cried Dick, and away they went for the cover.
 Exultant yells behind them told the Indians comprehended why they had so suddenly changed their course, and exulted accordingly.
 Entering the dark woods, the boys, to their astonishment, suddenly struck a well-beaten path.
 Along it they sent their wheels spinning.
 Presently a log cabin came in sight.
 Evidently it had been built by a white man.
 The boys were surprised.
 They had not expected to find the dwelling of a white man within a hundred miles of that spot.

Reaching the cabin the boys dismounted.
 Beyond it the steep, rocky wall of a hill, with no pathway up which a wheel could go, arose.
 "Into the cabin," said Dick.
 "Yes, we shall have to make a stand here."
 "And fight for our lives."
 "Yes."
 The two boys tried the closed door of the cabin.
 It yielded.
 They rushed inside.
 What was their astonishment then, to behold a young and beautiful girl alone in the cabin.
 She came forward.
 Dick closed the door.
 It was provided with heavy oaken bolts.
 Those he shot to their places.
 "Oh, I thought you might have brought my brother with you," said the girl.
 And she added quickly.
 "You have good faces, and I do not fear you."
 "You have no cause so to do," replied Dick.
 "What's that?"
 The girl turned pale, as she asked the question.
 The yells of the Indians rang in the wood near by.
 "Our pursuers, young lady, a band of Indians led by a murderous white renegade are after us," said Dick.
 "We could go no further on our wheels."
 "You are welcome here."
 "Thanks, miss."
 "We shall have to make a fort of this cabin, and hold it," said Tom.
 "Yes, yes, defend yourself. Oh, if my dear brother and good old Anthony were only here they would surely help you."
 "I doubt it not. Dick, stand our wheels against the wall yonder."
 While Tom did as directed the two lads glanced about the cabin.
 It was neat and clean.
 But what suited them best was the discovery that it was well supplied with loop-holes.
 "I guess we can make it cost the redskins dear to take us," said Dick.
 "Right you are! Never say die in the woods while we have a shot left."
 "You are made of the right stuff, Tom."
 "No use crying when one gets into a tight spot."
 "That's so."
 "For it will do no good."
 "No, indeed."
 "You are very brave. Just like my dear brother Ford," said the girl.
 "Ford!"
 "Ford!"
 Thus exclaimed both the boys in a breath:
 "Why, yes," responded the girl. "Ford Arden. Do you know him?"
 "No."
 "Yes."
 Dick and Tom answered contradictorily.
 Both stared at the young girl.
 They saw a family resemblance between her and the dead boy.
 "You are Mollie Arden?" asked Dick.
 "Yes, yes. But why do you ask? Who told you my name?"
 "Your brother."
 "Then you have met him?"
 "Yes."
 "Oh, I am so glad. He and good old Anthony have been absent so long I feared some harm had come to them."
 "We saw only your brother."
 Dick hesitated about saying more, though he felt that the painful duty of telling the young girl of the untimely death of her brother now fell to him.
 His face looked solemn and troubled.
 The girl seemed to divine something of his thoughts.
 She said:
 "You have bad news?"
 "Yes."
 She clasped her hands and turned very white.
 "Be brave, be calm, and you shall know the worst, and it is the worst."
 "The worst! Oh, no, no! You do not mean that—that—but it is too terrible—my dear, brave brother!"
 "Is no more."
 "Dead?" she screamed.
 "Yes."
 "Thud!"
 Before either of the boys could catch her, Mollie Arden fell as a dead weight at Dick's feet.
 The next instant the Indians reached the lonely cabin.
 The boy wheelmen snatched up their rifles and sprang to the nearest loopholes on the side of the redskins' approach.
 "Give them a volley!" cried Dick.
 The two repeating rifles began to crack immediately.
 The Indians fell back, helter skelter, and the boy wheelmen heard the renegade yell:

"By all the fates! the white spies of the wheel have taken shelter in the cabin of the missionary!"

"Ha! So this is the home of a missionary? Some good, devout man with the belief that it is his mission on earth to convert the red heathen," said Dick.

"No doubt."

"I wonder if his name is Arden?"

"And if the young girl is his daughter?"

"Yes."

"It may be so."

"I wondered how it could be that any white man dared make his home here in the Sioux country."

"So did I."

"But now it seems to be explained."

"Yes."

"The missionary must have found favor with the Sioux."

"Probably."

Just then there came a strange sound under the floor of the cabin.

The boys started.

They glanced about, but made no discovery, and were much mystified.

CHAPTER V.

SUGGESTING A STRANGE MYSTERY.

"I AM sure I heard a strange sound under the floor," said Dick, as he raised the fallen girl and sought to revive her, as soon as the Indians retreated.

"I heard it too," assented Tom.

There was a bucket of water on a bench in one corner of the room. Tom brought it to Dick, and the latter bathed Mollie Arden's temples.

She soon revived.

Then the boys had to tell her all the story of her brother's death.

She shed bitter tears.

But finally she grew more calm.

Then she asked:

"Do you know anything of Anthony? He is my guardian, a good missionary, with whom brother and I came to this wild land, to help in the great Christian work of converting the Indians."

"Your brother was alone when we found him," replied Dick.

And he added:

"Are the Indians friendly to the missionary?"

"They have always seemed to be so."

"And they were friendly to you and poor Ford?"

"Yes. In appearance, at least. But now, it seems, their friendliness was all a pretense."

"True. I cannot, for my part, comprehend how even a good missionary dare come to live here unprotected."

"And much less, can I comprehend how he could imperil you and your brother by bringing you here, if he had your welfare at heart," said Tom.

"Anthony loves us both. He is so simple minded, so devout, so good. He thought the Indians loved him."

"But how came he here first? Did he bring you and Ford with him when he first came to settle among the redskins?" asked Dick.

"Oh, no! Good Anthony spent a year as a missionary alone with the Sioux before he became our guardian."

"Then he was sure you would meet with a kind reception by the redmen before he brought you here?"

"So he assured us, and so it has seemed until now. The Indians often came here, and acted friendly. Our good Anthony often went away to preach to them in their villages, and in his absence we were never molested."

"Were you willing to come to this wild land and live among the Indians?"

"Oh, yes. I had worked in the Sunday mission at home, and so had Ford. It was not until good Anthony learned we were interested in the mission work that he proposed we should come with him here."

"Your parents are both dead?"

"Yes, and by my father's will Anthony was made our guardian."

"He was your father's friend?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever had any cause to doubt his goodness?"

"Never. And why do you ask?"

"I hardly know myself. But tell me, for what purpose did Anthony and Ford go away and leave you here alone?"

"Anthony went to hold services among the Indians, and Ford merely accompanied him to sing the sweet hymns. Oh, such a splendid voice had Ford!"

"Did you ever hear any strange noises under the floor?"

"Why, no! What makes you ask?"

"We thought a bit ago we heard sounds there."

"Impossible! At least I think your hearing must have been at fault."

"It is barely possible the sounds came from the outside of the cabin instead of the floor," admitted Dick.

During this conversation the Indians had not again come to attack the cabin.

"Did you know your brother had a message for General Custer?" asked Dick, presently.

"No; nor did I know that the Indians were at war with the whites."

"Surely the missionary must have known it."

"If so, he did not tell me, and I am sure my brother, Ford, was equally ignorant on the subject."

"This affair is most singular," remarked Dick, aside.

"What did you say?" asked the girl.

"It was nothing. But about the dispatch for General Custer. I conclude it must be your brother, Ford, received it, since he left the cabin."

"Certainly, or he would have been sure to tell me about it."

"How long have you been alone here?"

"Twenty-four hours and more."

"Were you not afraid?"

"Oh, no. Because I thought the Indians were friendly and the cabin walls were a guard against wild beasts."

"Where was your home before you came here?"

"In Helena."

"Your father died there?"

"Yes, a year after the death of my mother."

"Are you poor?"

"Oh, no. Father left brother Ford and I a comfortable fortune. But should we not live to attain our majority, according to the terms of the will, all the money is to go to charity, that is to say it is to go to good Anthony, to be expended for missionary work among the Indians."

"Have you relatives living?"

"No relatives, but many friends in Helena. My father's brother—an excellent physician—was lost in a snow-storm in the mountains last year. He was our last near relative."

Just then a startling sound was heard.

Then came a crash against the door.

The boys darted to it.

Through a loop-hole in the door they saw that the Indians had stealthily stolen up with a log for a battering-ram.

They had dashed the log against the door.

Dick and Tom the next moment sent a volley of shots into the ranks of the redskins before the door.

The latter dropped the log.

Then those who had not fallen under the fusillade from the weapons of the young wheelmen beat a hasty retreat.

Meantime it had not been an error on the part of the boys to think that they had heard a strange sound under the floor.

While Mollie Arden lay in a faint, and while the boys were intent upon the defense of the cabin, a section of the floor had noiselessly moved aside.

Then a human head had been thrust up into view.

Much would have been the surprise and alarm of the boys if they could have seen the man who then looked into the cabin.

He was the clean-shaved, white-haired man called Satterlee, whom they had seen talking with Delmart, the renegade.

What mystery was this?

Surely Satterlee was the foe of Mollie Arden, and he knew a secret of the cabin which it seemed might yet place the girl and the boy bicycle scouts in the hands of the redskins.

Almost instantly the head of the white-haired man disappeared below the cabin floor.

Then the section of the floor was by him drawn back to its place.

Then it was thus that the sound the boys had heard was made.

When the Indians dropped the battering-ram and retreated, Dick and Tom again turned to Mollie Arden.

The former said:

"Do you know Delmart, the renegade?"

"No."

"Have you ever heard of him?"

"No."

"Do you know a man called Satterlee?"

"I have never heard the name before."

"Well, this increases the mystery."

"What mystery?"

"Something that vitally concerns you."

"Then tell me all."

"I will, for I deem it best that you should know the truth, though I hope you will not be needlessly alarmed."

"I will be brave."

"I am sure of that."

Then Dick went on and told her all he had overheard of the conversation between Miles Delmart the renegade, and the white-haired old man called "Satterlee."

"All this amazes and perplexes me," said Mollie, when Dick had concluded.

"Satterlee looked like a minister," said Tom.

"That's so," Dick assented.

"I thought he might be known to Anthony the missionary."

"No. He has never mentioned his name."

"Why should he? Satterlee wants you out of his way."

"I cannot tell," replied Mollie.

"He would not profit by your death."

"Certainly not, since in that event my fortune goes to good Anthony to be used for missionary work."

"There is a mystery here that puzzles me."

"Yes."

"But no matter. Your brother asked us to protect you from your foes."

"Good Ford."

"And we will do our best for you."
 "That we will," put in Tom.
 "Thank you! Thank you!"
 "When do you look for the missionary home?"
 "I am expecting him all the time now."
 "When he comes I fear the Indians will kill him."
 "I trust not," said Mollie, fervently.

Then the boys went to the loop-holes again—that is to say both of them did, for—during the foregoing conversation, one or the other had kept a vigilant look out.

They did not mean the Indians should again creep up to the door, without their knowledge.

An hour elapsed.

The Indians did not make another attack.

Suddenly the boys, on the watch at the loop-holes, saw a tall white man clad in black, whose long beard reached to his waist, approaching.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE MISSIONARY.

"Look here."

It was Dick who spoke.

He turned from the loop-hole, and signaled Mollie.

The young girl immediately hastened to his side.

"Who is yonder man?"

Dick pointed at the approaching form.

Mollie glanced through the loop-hole.

She saw the man who was coming.

A glad cry escaped her.

"Anthony!" she exclaimed.

"Ah! The missionary?"

"Yes."

"Bravo! The Indians have not molested him," said Dick.

"No," assented the girl.

She saw that the patriarchal looking man was evidently unharmed.

"And yet the redskins haven't gone away, I'll wager," said Tom.

"I suspect they are hidden near," assented Dick.

"And then they must have seen the missionary."

"True."

"We have to conclude that they are friendly to him?"

"Yes."

"Let us hope his influence with the red men may save us all."

Mollie made the remark fervently.

"Amen to that, though I fear we cannot count on the missionary to protect us. We have had to shoot down some of the reds," replied Dick.

"And the motto of the Indians is always vengeance—a life for a life."

"Right you are, Tom."

"The reds will not easily give up trying to get our scalps."

"No."

"And then, too, I suspect they are after the sealed dispatch intrusted to us for General Custer by poor Ford Arden."

"No doubt."

"The Indians evidently regard the missive as important."

"Yes."

"And that is why, it is my opinion, they will never leave our trail while we are alive."

"Or they have secured the dispatch."

"Certainly."

"Look there!"

Dick uttered the words.

As he spoke he pointed through the loop-hole at which he stood.

Tom sprang to his cousin.

Mollie was yet at Dick's side.

All three looked through the loop-hole.

They saw what Dick had discovered.

At some distance in the rear of the approaching missionary, the head of an Indian was seen raised above the bushes.

He was spying upon the good man.

"That settles it!" said Dick.

"What?"

"That the Indians know he is here."

"Yes. The coming of the missionary is no secret from them."

A moment later the missionary was at the door.

Dick admitted him.

As he entered, the patriarchal man of the flowing beard gave a violent start.

"What's this? Strangers?" he said.

The young girl had sprang to meet him.

He kissed her with a paternal air on the brow.

"Daughter, who are these young strangers of our race?" he asked.

"Fugitives."

"What mean you?"

"As I say."

"Sir," said Dick, "we have been hunted by the Indians."

"And sought shelter here," put in Tom.

"Art welcome."

The missionary spoke in a friendly way.

"My blessing upon you both."

He extended his hand in benediction.

The boys bowed reverently.

Dick meantime had secured the door.

"Oh, Anthony! oh, my foster father, I have such sad tidings for thee," cried Mollie.

"What is it?" asked the missionary.

"Why came not Ford back with thee?"

"Oh, he went with some of our red brothers on a hunt."

"And they have murdered him."

"No, no!"

"It is true."

"Impossible!"

"Such is the sad fact," said Dick.

"Tell me all."

Dick did so.

"This perplexeth me exceedingly. The ways of Providence are mysterious and past finding out."

"Did you not think that the Indians were friendly to you and Ford?" Dick asked.

"Yes, yes. It must be Ford has mortally offended the redmen since last I saw him."

"Did you not see the Indians as you came here?"

"No."

"They attacked the cabin."

"When?"

"A bit ago."

"Then they must have retreated far away."

"No."

"How do you know that?"

The missionary spoke sharply.

The bicycle scouts saw his brow wrinkle into a frown above his spectacles of colored glass.

"We saw an Indian spying upon you as you came here."

"Can it be?"

"It is as I say. I fear the Indians have deceived you. Do you not know they are at war with the whites?"

"No, no. It may be as you say. The evil one may have gained ascendancy even in the hearts of such of the poor red men, as I trusted I had through my labors, turned into the path of christianity and peace toward all men."

"I believe we shall be attacked. The chances are a cruel death awaits us all."

"Heaven forbid!"

"What's that?"

At that moment a shout was heard from the outside.

All the inmates of the cabin flew to the loop-holes.

A tall Indian was seen in the path.

He had a white rag fastened to the end of his gun.

This he was waving.

"Hello! what does that mean?"

Tom uttered the cry.

"The white flag is a peace signal."

The missionary so replied.

"That's so," Dick assented.

"The red wants a parley," said Tom.

"Yes."

"I'll halt him."

"All right."

"Hold on there, Mr. Injun!"

The redskin stopped.

"Wah! Injun want talk."

In reply to the shout from the Sioux, Dick made answer:

"Go on."

"White Boys got talking paper!"

"Well?"

"Injun want it."

"You don't say?"

"Yes."

"I can't help it."

"White boys must give it up!"

"Really?"

"Else Injun kill!"

"That would be too bad."

"White boy no make sport."

"Not at all."

"If give up talking paper let um go."

"How kind."

"Do not enrage the red man. Levity, at this time of danger, seemeth to me exceedingly out of place. Verily it is unseemly," said the missionary.

"Beg pardon."

Then to the Indian.

"Mr. Paint and Feathers we can't make terms with you."

"Why not?"

"We know you too well."

"What mean?"

"You would not keep faith."

"Injun say yes."

"I say no."

"White boy heap big liar."

"Can't beat Injun."

"Give up talking paper, else burn at stake."

"It's no use, red."

"White boy won't make treaty?"

"No."

"Then Injun talk no more."

"That's right."

"Wah! white boy soon beg."

"Guess not."

"No escape for whites."

"You don't know that."

"Injuns all around cabin."

"Well, you git now. I've no more breath to waste."

"Whoop! Whoop!"

With a wild yell the Indian bounded out of the path.

An instant after he disappeared in the bushes a shot was fired at the cabin.

Then came a volley.

The Indians had returned to the attack in earnest.

While Dick and Tom returned the fire of the savages from the loopholes, the missionary fell upon his knees in one corner of the cabin.

He seemed to pray.

But, presently, he sprang up.

"This is not the right course, my young friend. Take heed of one whose years are many, and who hath got wisdom by experience!"

Thus cried the missionary.

"What would you advise?"

Tom asked the question eagerly, for he knew that he and Dick could not long hold the cabin against the redskins.

The reply of the missionary surprised the boys beyond measure.

CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERIOUS INVASION OF THE CABIN.

Not only were the two boy bicycle scouts surprised, but they were indignant as well.

The missionary said:

"Give up the paper that the red men seek!"

"Never!" cried Tom.

"Never?" uttered Dick,

"It is better to do so, than that the maiden should perish at the hands of the Indians."

"Think not of me, good Anthony—my foster father," said Mollie.

"You would not have us surrender the letter your brother charged us, with his last breath, to deliver to General Custer?"

Dick asked the question.

"No! No!"

"I thought not."

"Brave girl," added Tom.

"No, be true to your trust, come what may, I am sure it is only the solicitude of good Anthony, on my account, that caused him to counsel you to give up the sealed dispatch."

So added Mollie.

"Yes, yes."

The missionary hastened to make the confirmatory statement.

But Dick, who was covertly watching him closely, wondered why it was that his eyes flashed so fiercely behind his glasses.

The Indians' firing had again ceased.

The night began to darken.

During the period of moonlight, which had thus far illuminated the night, the boy bicycle scouts had been able to see all around the cabin.

So the Indians could not creep up undetected.

But now the brave lads began to shudder.

They had a new fear.

They dreaded the darkness.

It seemed surely coming now.

Under cover of complete gloom the Indians might creep up to the cabin.

Then they could set fire to it.

Or it might be they would again attack the door.

As the moon sank lower and lower the boys felt as if the time of doom was swiftly drawing on.

Dick suddenly made Tom a covert signal.

In a moment the boy bicycle scouts were together.

Dick said:

"There is only one chance for us now."

"What is that?"

"To slip away unseen by the Indians."

"As soon as darkness falls complete?"

"Yes."

"You are right."

"Shall we try it?"

"Yes."

"And Mollie?"

"She must go with us."

"The missionary too?"

"Yes, if he will."

"Right. Knowing as we do that Mat Delmart is engaged in a deadly plot against Mollie, we cannot leave her here."

"Certainly not."

"For Mat Delmart leads the savages."

"Yes, and once Mollie is in his power?"

"We must conclude he will have her slain."

"I wish we could get at the secret of Satterlee—the motive he has for seeking the doom of Mollie."

"So do I."

"I cannot even imagine how he can hope to profit by the terrible crime."

"Nor I, for if Mollie is slain her money goes to the good old missionary to convert the Indians, you know."

"The mystery makes me angry. The whole affair is simple enough if we only had the clew, I'll wager, though."

"Yes, and it's money the renegade's employer—old Satterlee—is after."

"True. The remarks of the villainous pair which we overheard told me that."

"Yes."

Then Dick turned to Mollie and the missionary.

He said:

"We have decided on an attempt to save ourselves as soon as darkness falls."

"How will you proceed?"

The missionary asked the question eagerly with evident curiosity and surprise as well.

"As soon as it becomes completely dark we will slip out of the cabin and try to elude the reds."

"A foolhardy plan," replied the missionary.

"It is our only chance. Will you go with us?"

"No."

"And you, Mollie?"

"I—I—I fear to stay, and yet—"

"Oh, you will not desert your old foster father. Oh, my daughter, I will labor with the redmen when these lads of warlike temper are gone. I am sure the redmen will not harm us. It is only the strangers who have evoked the anger of the Sioux."

"Sir missionary," said Dick, a little hotly. "When I related all about the death of Ford Arden—the brother of the young lady—I stated that Mat Delmart, the renegade chief of the Sioux, and one Satterlee—as graceless an old villain as ever went unhung, no doubt—mean to doom the fair girl. Therefore, you will be powerless to protect her."

"Yes—yes. Oh, forgive me, good Anthony. I cannot stay here! Something tells to go with the young strangers. My brother trusted them, and so will I."

"Well said, brave girl!" cried Dick.

Mollie came and put her little hand in his trustfully, as she said:

"You will stand in the place of a brother to me now, will you not, Dick?"

"I will! I will! God help me to save you."

The boy answered in fervent tones.

"Oh, the perversity of youth!" uttered the missionary.

"And the blind, senile folly of age."

Tom so retorted irreverently.

"My child, I am thy guardian, but far be it from me to seek to exercise the authority over thy movements which a more worldly man in my place might seek to employ to detain thee."

The missionary made the remark almost tearfully.

"Understand the facts. Mollie goes to save her life."

As Dick spoke the last rays of the vanishing moon were blotted out by the shadows.

Darkness fell.

The gloom was complete.

Inside the cabin, as well as without, the shadows held supremacy now.

Under cover of the gloom the inmates of the cabin could not plainly discern each other's movements.

"Come!" said Dick.

"Shall we go now?" Mollie asked.

"Yes."

"Are you ready?" he added.

"I am."

"And I."

"So said Tom.

"Then follow me."

"One moment."

It was the missionary who spoke.

Dick was leading the way to the door.

He paused.

"What is it?" he said to the missionary.

"If thou wilt all go, mayhap, in mine humble way, I can be of some service."

"How?"

"By telling thee of a secret path."

"Through the woods?"

"Yes."

"Then make haste."

"Yes, for every moment now increases our peril," added Tom.

"I will explain. When thee hast passed the great oak, on the path, turn sharp to the left for a hundred yards. That will bring thee to a great rock. At the foot of the rock you will find the path, and you have only to follow it to—"

The words of the missionary were suddenly interrupted.

A startling incident transpired.

There came a crashing sound under the floor.

The next instant the cabin interior was alight with the blaze of torches.

Up through a square opening in the floor swarmed half a dozen hideously painted savages.

Two of the foremost redskins carried torches in their hands.

Dick and Tom bounded to the door, dragging Mollie with them.

The missionary sprang into a corner and cried aloud:

"Hold! Hold, my red brethren! Listen to the words of peace! Let not evil passions prevail. Peace! peace, I command ye!"

But his words were unheeded.

Tom and Dick had barely time to get their wheels, which stood by the door, righted, when the six Indians who had come up through the cabin floor rushed at them.

"Bang, bang, bang!"

"Bang, bang, bang!"

Thrice each of the boy wheelmen discharged their revolvers.

The rain of lead met the charging red demons and dropped three of them dead in their tracks.

Mollie tore open the door.

"Now!"

Thus shouted Dick, as the three surviving intruders of the cabin fell back.

Out through the door the brave lads propelled their wheels.

At a word from Dick, Mollie sprang up before him, and then away sped the two young wheelmen along the pathway they had traversed to gain the cabin.

Meantime up into the structure swarmed the rest of the band of Delmart.

Among the last came the renegade.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE LAVA BEDS—THE BICYCLE SCOUTS' LEAP FOR LIFE.

THE entire band of savages had traversed an underground passage leading from the side of a bank that formed the elevation on the south, upon which the cabin stood.

Delmart evinced a knowledge of the secret route.

It seemed evident that Satterlee, whom we saw slyly look into the cabin from the opening in the floor that communicated with the secret passage, must have told the renegade about it.

But Satterlee did not enter the cabin of the missionary in company with Delmart and the redskins.

On the contrary, the renegade was attended only by the Sioux.

Scarcely a moment after the redskins thronged into the cabin, they were again in pursuit of General Custer's boy bicycle scouts.

But not one of the Indians or Delmart lifted a hand against the old missionary.

When they had gone in pursuit of the boy wheelmen old Anthony left the cabin.

He followed the boys and their enemies.

Meantime the former had gained a start.

They left the path.

Immediately they struck south.

The woods was open.

The trees did not impede the flight of the brave boys.

On and on they went.

But ere long they knew that the Indians had mounted their ponies and were riding after them.

"We have got to take desperate chances," suddenly said Dick.

"How do you mean?"

Tom asked the question as he heard the hoofs of the pursuing Indians' horses drawing nearer and nearer.

"We must hide."

"Where?"

"In the lava beds."

"We cannot traverse them any distance."

"I know."

"That was why we turned aside."

"When we came to them before?"

"Yes."

"And now."

"We will venture as far as we can into the treacherous plain of pitfalls."

"All right."

"In some volcanic rift, or crater-like place we will hide."

"The mounted Indians will not dare to ride into the lava-beds!"

"No. They call them the bad lands of the north."

"But they will dismount and follow us on foot."

"Yes."

"Ultimately we shall be run down."

"Probably."

"But you mean to struggle to the last?"

"Yes."

"All right."

They turned from the timber.

In a moment the boy wheelmen propelled their bicycles into the lava beds.

They were obliged to go slow.

They had to make the great wheels pick their way among the chaotic masses of volcanic rocks and strangely colored lava formation that strewed the way.

"Ha! ha!"

Dick suddenly uttered the shary cry.

He was on the brink of a crack in the earth.

The opening was several feet wide.

"Can you jump it?" asked Tom, pulling up his wheel with the break.

"I'll try."

Mollie shuddered.

Her face turned

But she was brave.

Not a word to discourage the young heroes who were seeking to save her did she allow to pass her lips.

"Hold firm," said Dick to Mollie.

"I will," she cried.

Then he turned and rode back some yards.

An instant and the daring young wheelman again faced the chasm.

Then he set his teeth firmly.

His eyes flashed.

"Hasten! Hasten!" cried Tom.

Dick glanced back.

He saw the Indians.

Led by Delmart, the renegade, they were now just at the edge of the lava beds.

"Now I go! It's life or death that depends upon the leap!" cried Dick.

Mollie shut her eyes and clung to Dick as the great wheel began to revolve.

On! On!

Dick leaned far over the crossbar.

He sent his wheel forward.

The daring bicycle rider rushed straight at the terrible leap.

In all the daring deeds he had yet accomplished on the wheel, he had never previously undertaken anything like this.

He meant to make the bicycle leap the wide chasm.

Dick had measured the dangerous span with his eye.

He believed it was possible the feat he had decided upon could be accomplished.

But the question was:

Could he do it?

Tom held his breath.

Standing motionless, he watched the rush of his comrade's wheel.

On, on, until the great wheel spun so fast he could not see its spokes.

On, on, until the brink of the chasm was reached.

Tom closed his eyes.

He felt that if Dick and Mollie were doomed to fall to death he could not bear to witness their doom.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Tom hears the shouts.

He opens his eyes.

Then a glad cry escapes him.

"Thank Heaven!" he says fervently as he sees that Dick and Mollie have leaped the chasm.

Safely the doubly laden wheel stands on the other side of the chasm.

And Dick waves his hands and shouts:

"Follow! Follow! You can do it, Tom, if you only think so!"

Tom shudders, but he knows he too must make the terrible leap.

He glances to the rear.

Now he sees the redskins have dismounted.

On foot they come.

They are in the lava beds.

Soon they will be upon him.

"I'll be with you in a moment, Dick. God willing!" shouts the brave lad.

Then he too rushes his wheel at the terrible leap.

Now it is Dick and Mollie's turn to watch the issue in breathless suspense.

They do so.

They see Tom coming at full speed, at the chasm.

He reaches the brink.

The wheel bounds through space.

Oh, will he clear the chasm?

His companions silently pray that he may do so.

One instant and then. Oh, joy! joy! Dick and Mollie cry out in delight.

Tom has alighted safely beside them.

Then on.

The redskins gain the chasm presently.

Delmart is in the lead.

On the brink of the fall he halts.

He dare not attempt the leap.

The Indians paused.

But one young warrior more daring than the rest scoffs at his comrades, and says:

"Red Wolf will take the leap."

"Don't try it, lad."

So old Rain-in-the-face admonished the young warrior.

But he heeded not the warning. He made a rush at the chasm and leaped into the air. One moment his form was in space.

And then he disappeared down, down!

He had failed to span the terrible fall.

Presently Rain-in-the-face said:

"We will have them yet."

"How so?" demanded Delmart.

"The chief will show you."

"Good."

"We must turn back."

"You shall lead now."

"Rain-in-the-face will prove a good leader."

"I am sure of that."

Soon the Indians had returned to the edge of the lava beds. There they remounted.

Just as they were turning away Satterlee rode up—mounted upon the same horse that he had ridden when the boy bicycle scouts saw him part with the renegade.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! What fools we mortals be!" cried Satterlee.

"The plot failed," he added.

"Yes," assented Delmart.

"Just as we were sure of success."

"That's so."

"But next time?"

"We shall succeed."

"What do you suggest?"

"A stratagem."

"But we shall have to overtake the fugitives first?"

"True."

"Can we do it?"

"Rain-in-the-Face says so."

"You can rely on the chief."

"I think so."

"You will go with us, Satterlee?"

"Certainly."

"Then come on. We will talk as we go."

"Yes."

The entire band, with old Rain-in-the-Face, now wheeled their horses.

They rode south, along the edge of the lava beds.

Meanwhile the boy bicycle scouts had disappeared in that plain of many pitfalls and deadly perils.

Satterlee and the renegade entered into a conversation that boded evil for the fugitives, and revealed a terrible and cunning scheme to doom them all.

CHAPTER IX.

WHO SENT THE SEALED DISPATCH—THRILLING DISCOVERIES.

MORNING!

The sun shone brightly.

The golden rays painted the strange rocks of lava formation in new and fantastic colors.

The boy bicycle scouts and the young girl they were so heroically trying to save were clear of the strange land.

Beyond lay a beautiful country.

It was diversified, as a landscape must be to please the eye.

There was prairie, upland and woods.

A range of hills, a low branch of the Black range, appeared on the horizon.

A river, whose serpentine course caught the sunshine and reflected it until it seemed like a thread of silver on the emerald mantled earth, could be discerned.

"Yonder to the south lies our goal!" said Dick.

As he spoke he pointed ahead.

"You mean that the Army of General Custer is yonder?" said Mollie.

"Yes."

"And we have most important news for him," said Dick.

"Oh, you mean the sealed dispatch?"

"Not that alone."

"No."

"No. The fact is Tom and I have gained some most important information regarding the plans of the redskins.

"Indeed."

"You see, Miss Mollie, we know we can trust you, and so I'll tell you what we know."

"If you please."

"Well then, by spying near the camp-fire of a band of the Sioux scouts yesterday morning, just before dawn, we gained the knowledge that Sitting Bull meant to draw General Custer into a death trap."

"How so?"

"It seems for weeks the Sioux have been massing. Now they have an immense force."

"Yes."

"By showing a small force they mean to lead General Custer into an ambush."

"Ha! an Indian stratagem."

"Yes."

"Characteristic of the race."

"It is."

"Now we want to warn General Custer of all this."

"Yes."

"And delay in doing so may be fatal."

"I see."

"But I pray that we may reach the army in time."

"So do I."

"General Custer is a brave man," said Tom.

"Yes, and his very fearlessness may lead him astray."

"True."

"He has too much contempt for the cunning and prowess of the redskins."

"Yes."

"And he underrates the force of the Sioux."

"That's so, if the scouts we spied upon told the truth."

"I think they did."

"So do I. They knew not there were spies near, and among themselves they could have no reason for falsehood."

"True."

Mollie was heard to sigh.

"What is it, Miss Mollie?"

So asked Dick.

"I was thinking of poor Anthony and of my future."

"Do not worry."

"I cannot help doing so."

"I assure you that as soon as we reach General Custer's army you shall be sent in safety to Helena—to your friends."

"That would be my wish."

"As for the missionary, I trust the Indians may have spared his life."

"And I. He is a good man. The conversion of the Indians is the work to which he has devoted his life."

"It would be base ingratitude for them to harm him."

"Yes."

Presently, there being no signs of pursuit, Dick said:

"We will halt in yonder grove."

"Yes," replied Tom; "I am terribly hungry."

A few moments and the grove was reached.

Setting their bicycles up against the trunks of the great trees, the boys produced hampers from which they took corned meat, bread and coffee.

But they feared the smoke of a fire might betray them to the enemy.

So, as Tom was getting water at a spring, it was decided not to attempt to make coffee.

With the pure spring water and the food mentioned the young fugitives made an excellent meal.

Fasting had sharpened their appetites.

Even Mollie partook of the rude fare in a way that pleased her boy comrades.

When they had all satisfied their hunger they rested awhile.

They were all pretty well tired out.

All night long they had traveled.

After passing out of sight of the Indians behind a hill in the lava beds they turned west.

The way ahead in the lava district was becoming fairly impassable.

Without mishap the fugitives got clear of the lava beds at one side as soon as possible.

As soon as they felt able to proceed, the young wheelmen and the girl fugitive pressed forward once more as before.

But a halt was made at noon.

Again the delightful shade of a beautiful grove sheltered them.

While they rested and partook of food, Dick produced the sealed package.

As he examined its wrapper of buckskin he made a discovery.

On the bleached skin was a line of neatly written directions, written in blue.

Holding up the package Dick pointed to the inscription.

While Mollie and Dick came and looked over his shoulder he read it.

The inscription ran thus:

"GEN. GEORGE A. CUSTER,

"ARMY OF THE YELLOWSTONE.

"From his old friend and former comrade, BARTON ARDEN, M. D."

"Arden! Why, that's your name, Mollie!"

"Yes."

She answered pantingly.

The two boys looked into her face.

They saw she was excited.

"What is it?"

Dick asked the question eagerly.

"Barton Arden is my uncle. He was lost in the Montana mountains in the storm a year ago. But I told you that at the cabin."

"So you did!" exclaimed Dick.

"This is wonderful!" added Tom.

"It is—it is!" Mollie exclaimed.

"What does it mean?" she added.

"That your uncle lives!" cried Dick.

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly."

"Yes, it must be so, and he gave Ford the package."

"There is a mystery."

"The question is why has Dr. Arden remained as one dead to the world for a year?" said Tom.

"I think I can tell," Dick replied.

"What do you think?"

"That Dr. Arden has been a prisoner in the power of the Sioux all the time since he was supposed to have been lost in the mountains."

"I believe you have hit it."

"And being unable to escape himself, Doctor Arden intrusted the message for General Custer to Ford."

"Yes."

"Among the Indians Doctor Arden may have made some great discoveries, which he desires to communicate to the general."

"Precisely."

"I am very curious as to the contents of the package."

"So am I."

Just then, Mollie uttered a startled cry.

As she did so, she pointed.

The boys seized their rifles and glanced in the direction indicated by the girl.

She directed their vision to the route they had traversed.

They saw a solitary horseman.
He was coming towards the grove.
The next moment Mollie cried out:
"I know him?"
"Who is he?" asked Dick.
"Anthony, the good missionary."
"So he is," said the boy.
He made the rider out clearly then.
"He has followed us," said Tom.
"So it seems."
"But why?"
"That is the question."

"He will be here in a moment, then he will tell us all," said Mollie.

While the girl and Tom continued to watch the approach of the missionary Dick stepped back to his wheel, unstrapped the flap of the leather pocket secured to the seat, and put the sealed dispatch in it. Then he carefully secured the buckle.

A few moments later the missionary rode into the grove.

"Oh, my dear daughter. Oh, my dear, young Christian friends. It is indeed a glad sight for my old eyes to behold you all once more safe and unharmed. Surely Providence has been merciful to us poor sinners!" he cried as he saw the fugitives.

Then he alighted.

Having first embraced Mollie in a paternal way, he shook hands warmly with the two lads and said:

"You were right, my dear young friends. The seed I have sown diligently in my Master's vineyard has fallen upon barren ground, and it has failed to take root."

"Ah! Then the Indians are perverse?" replied Dick, smiling.

"Yea, yea, even as was Pharaoh of old. And when ye were gone, as the children of Israel in flight, the red heathens did scoff at me, and did bid me follow thee, or they would smite me full sore."

"Poor Anthony! The Indians then drove you away, after all the good you have done them?" said Mollie in sympathetic tones.

Just then Dick drew Tom aside and whispered a startling discovery he had just made that thrilled his young comrade to the heart and deepened the envining mysteries.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOY BICYCLE SCOUTS ASTOUNDED.

"Tom," Dick said, in a whisper, "the horse the missionary has ridden here is the same animal that we saw Satterlee ride away on, when he parted with Delmart the renegade, before we rescued Ford Arden from the stake."

Dick pointed at the missionary's horse as he spoke, and added:

"See for yourself, Tom."

Tom's eyes opened wide, and an expression of complete astonishment came upon his features.

"It is so. It is the same horse, but I had not noticed the fact," he said.

"What can this mean?"

"I don't know."

"It looks like another mystery."

"Yes."

"Tom, we must know how the missionary came by the horse of the arch villain who is the employer of Mat Delmart."

"Yes."

Just then they heard the missionary speaking to Mollie.

The boys listened

The long bearded old man said:

"I am weary, and the heat of the day has fallen heavily upon me. So will I go to yonder spring and quench my thirst and bathe my brow."

He walked away.

When he was gone Dick said:

"That's a fine horse your guardian rides. Has he had him long?"

"Oh, yes, Black Hawk—that's his name—has been owned by good Anthony ever since we came here among the Indians."

Presently the missionary came back.

Going up to the fine black horse he stroked his neck, saying:

"I came near losing thee, my fine fellow. The red heathens did spirit thee away from my possession several hours during the early part of the night. But anon I heard thee at the cabin door, where I was alone after the departure of the maiden and the young men."

Dick and Tom looked relieved as they heard this, and perhaps they felt somewhat ashamed too, if they had begun to entertain any suspicion against the devout missionary.

That afternoon the latter journeyed on in company with the boy bicycle scouts.

The good man spoke of the Indians in a manner to reassure the young fugitives.

He said:

"The Indians have turned back from following thee, even as did the remnant of Pharaoh's host when the waters of the Red Sea rolled upon them as they pursued the children of Israel."

When they heard this the young wheelmen proceeded more leisurely.

That night they encamped beside a small, swift stream.

It was agreed that the two boys and the missionary should take turns in standing watch.

"Good Anthony" took the first watch.

Dick fell asleep seeing the missionary standing alert and watchful at the edge of the camp.

How long he had slumbered he knew not, but suddenly Dick was awakened by feeling a hand gently thrust into his bosom where he had kept the sealed dispatch.

Without stirring Dick partially opened his eyes.

He saw a white-haired, clean-shaven man, with a thin, eager face, and a cast of countenance that reminded him of a bird of prey bending above him.

The man was Satterlee.

Dick recognized him at a glance, and knew that the old villain was seeking to rob him of the sealed dispatch.

Dick bounded up and tried to clutch the rascal. But with surprising agility he eluded the boy.

One leap carried the white-haired man into an adjacent thicket.

Dick uttered a shout and instantly Tom and Mollie started up.

But the missionary was nowhere to be seen.

"What was it?"

In a few words Dick explained what had taken place, while he and Tom stood with their rifles in hand momentarily expecting an attack of the enemy.

"Oh! The Indians may have carried off good Anthony," said Mollie.

But just then the missionary strode into the camp.

"The enemy be nigh. Verily did I see one of them and went toward him beyond the camp that I might learn if they were in force. But I saw no more of them," said the missionary.

Dick told him of his experience.

He added:

"I mean to send a bullet through that villainous old wretch—Satterlee—if I ever get a chance. A wretch like him who can conspire with a blood-thirsty renegade for the murder of a poor innocent girl like Mollie deserves to die."

The missionary nodded.

But in sanctimonious tones he presently added:

"'Tis best we leave the punishment of our enemies to a higher power than that of man."

"I cannot agree with you," replied Dick.

Until dawn none of the party slept.

When the sun came up it was seen that there was no enemy near. They were alone in the great and the vast plain, all around, seemed to be deserted by all human kind.

Dick and Tom were perplexed and mystified anew.

They could scarcely think it probable that Satterlee had come there alone.

But if he was attended by the Indians, why had not an attack been made after the failure of the old rascal's attempt to steal the sealed dispatch?

The question neither Dick nor Tom could answer.

"By nightfall we should reach General Custer, unless he has moved his army since we left it," said Dick, as the march was resumed.

"Would he be likely to move before you returned?"

The missionary asked this question.

"No. He said that he should not move until he heard our report."

"You were sent out as the general's scouts, even as the spies were sent into Egypt in the holy days, to search out the land?" said the missionary.

"We acted as scouts, certainly."

The conversation was then changed.

When noon came, a halt was made.

"We may venture to make a little fire now, I think," said Dick, and he soon had a good blaze, with a coffee pot simmering over it.

Mollie had strayed some distance from the little camp fire.

Tom was with her.

Good Anthony sat near the fire.

Dick was not conscious of the fact but the missionary was watching the lad covertly with an intensity of gaze for which there seemed no cause.

Presently as the fire began to die the missionary said:

"Come, come, thee had better bring more fuel lad or the fire will go out."

"That's so," said Dick turning from his bicycle.

He had been oiling the bearings.

Setting the wheel against a tree Dick set off to bring fuel.

There was a fallen tree whose branches dead and dry would serve for the fire near.

Dick hastened to the tree.

He gathered an armful of limbs,

While he was thus engaged the missionary crept to the fire.

He glanced at Mollie and Tom.

Their backs were turned.

"Good!"

Thus uttered the missionary.

Then he looked at Dick.

He saw the boy was not observing him.

"Now is the time."

As he thus spoke to himself the missionary thrust his hand into his bosom.

He drew it forth at once.

In his palm he held a small pouch made of the skin of the rattlesnake.

This he opened.

Near the fire he crept.

Again he glanced covertly around, and still it seemed he was not noticed by his young comrades.

"They do not see me."
 As he muttered the words he seized the coffee pot.
 Removing its lid he poured the contents of the rattlesnake's skin into the steaming coffee.
 Then he replaced the cover.
 Quickly he put the pot back on the fire.
 Then he crept away.
 His eyes flashed.
 His expression was exultant.
 He was sure none of the trio in his company had witnessed his strange conduct.
 To himself the old missionary muttered when he had again become seated.
 "Now the sleeping herb of the Sioux is in the coffee."
 He added:
 "All who partake of it will sleep as if dead for many hours."
 He rubbed his hands.
 Between his thin lips he showed his teeth in a smile.
 But it was not a smile of mirth.
 Oh, no.
 On the contrary it was an expression of cruel pleasure.
 He anticipated results which gave him a sense of secret delight.
 Presently Dick returned with the fuel he had gathered.
 He heaped it on the fire.
 Again the flame blazed.
 The fire burned brightly.
 Soon the coffee was pronounced ready.
 Dick called Tom, add Mollie.
 All the party gathered near the fire.
 Dick lifted the pot from the flames.
 But as he did so he uttered a sharp cry and dropped it.
 He had forgotten the handle was very hot.
 It had burned his hand.
 As it fell the coffee pot was upset.
 Its contents were spilled.
 Not a drink was left.
 "This is too bad. The coffee is all wasted. But never mind, I can soon make some more," said Dick.
 But the missionary turned away with an expression of terrible rage and disappointment upon his face.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CLIMAX OF MYSTERY.

THE missionary walked away at some distance from the camp-fire.
 At last he halted.
 Then he muttered to himself:
 "A conspiracy of the fates is against me!"
 He ground his teeth and added:
 "I have no more of the drug of the Sioux with me."
 For a moment he was silent.
 Then again his voice sounded.
 He uttered the following words:
 "My schemes all seem to fail. I counted surely on the success of my stratagem."
 Pacing up and down between the trees out of sight of the camp-fire, the missionary reflected for a long time.
 Evidently his thoughts were not pleasant ones.
 His brow became contracted in a frown.
 He said finally aloud:
 "Maybe it will be gold dearly bought after all."
 Ere long the missionary started.
 He heard the voice of Mollie.
 She was calling him.
 The young girl cried:
 "Come, come, good Anthony. The coffee is ready again now."
 "How like his voice—how like the tones of Ford," muttered the missionary.
 He shuddered.
 A squirrel scattered the dry leaves behind him suddenly.
 He started and trembled.
 "Fool that I am. My nerves are failing me just when I need them most," he said.
 Then, with an effort, he seemed to repress the emotions which had almost mastered him.
 Slowly he walked back to the camp-fire.
 Both the lads and Mollie noted that his face was dark and stern of expression.
 In silence he ate and drank.
 Great would have been the surprise and mystification of the lads had they known that the missionary had attempted to put a drug in the coffee.
 Still more, perhaps, would they have been astonished and perplexed, could they have overheard the soliloquy of the missionary, when he went away from the camp fire.
 The meal having been eaten, the journey was resumed.
 But while the lads were looking to their bicycles before again setting out, the missionary, unnoticed, busied himself with his horse.
 It was a strange thing that he did.
 Having produced a fine Indian fishing line of braided horse-hair, he tied it about the right fore leg of his fine horse, just under the fetlocks.
 Then he put a thorn under the cord and secured it so it would slightly prick the flesh of the horse.

Since the missionary joined the trio, Mollie had ridden behind him, on the great black horse.
 She did so the day we are writing of.
 But the missionary had not gone far when the horse he and Mollie rode went lame.
 The animal limped painfully.
 It seemed that there was something wrong with his right fore leg.
 The missionary got down and examined it.
 But he said:
 "I can find nothing wrong."
 "Probably a sprain," said Dick, who was something of a horseman as well as a wheelman.
 "No doubt," assented the missionary.
 A halt had been called while he examined the horse.
 But immediately the journey was resumed.
 The horse got worse and worse.
 He fell behind.
 The young wheelmen had to check their speed.
 But the missionary said:
 "Go on—go on! I'll keep you in sight."
 The boys rode ahead.
 But from time to time they glanced back.
 Always they saw the doubly burdened horse coming on with painful limps.
 Not many miles from the place where the young wheelmen had last checked their speed, they entered an open woods.
 Just as they rode into it they glanced back.
 "Good!" cried Dick. "The black horse is improving."
 "That's so."
 "He is coming on quite well, now."
 "Yes."
 "At that rate, Mollie and the missionary will soon overtake us."
 "So they will."
 It did indeed seem that the lame horse was mending its pace.
 But just before the two boy-wheelmen last looked back at it, the missionary had dismounted.
 He examined the leg of the horse.
 For a moment only was he thus engaged.
 Then he leaped into the saddle.
 "Do you yet find the cause of Black Hawk's lameness?" asked Mollie.
 "I think I have."
 "What was it?"
 "A small pebble in his hoof."
 "Which you failed to see before?"
 "Yes."
 "See, he goes better now."
 Mollie thus exclaimed as the missionary urged the horse on.
 She was delighted to see that he limped less painfully.
 The truth was the missionary had slightly loosened the cord and removed the irritating thorn.
 Dick and Tom rode a short distance into the timber.
 Then they glanced back.
 Still the black horse was not in sight.
 "We will halt here," said Dick then.
 "And wait for the missionary to come up?"
 "Yes."
 The boys alighted from their wheels at once.
 Some moments elapsed.
 Still the black horse did not appear in the woods.
 Dick and Tom soon became anxious.
 Finally the former said:
 "I fear something must have happened."
 "To the missionary."
 "Yes."
 "So do I."
 "Suppose we ride back."
 "Yes."
 The lads sprang upon their wheels.
 In a moment they were spinning on the back track.
 As swiftly as possible they traversed the way to the edge of the timber.
 Then they halted.
 "What can this mean?"
 Dick uttered the words.
 His tones were indicative of great surprise.
 He saw nothing of the missionary or Mollie.
 The black horse and his two riders had disappeared.
 Vainly the two boys swept the plain, with eager searching glances.
 Of the ones they sought to discover they could detect no trace.
 "Merciful Heaven! What can have happened to them?" cried Tom.
 "That we must find out."
 "Can it be they have been surprised and spirited away by the Indians?"
 "I think not."
 "Why?"
 "Because we heard no sound from the rear."
 "True."
 "The capture would not have been made in silence."
 "Right."
 "This is a new puzzle."
 "Yes."

"Can you suggest an explanation?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"What shall we do?"

"Ride back."

"And seek the trail of the black horse?"

"Yes."

"I am with you."

"Come on."

Out of the woods they dashed.

They sent their wheels spinning away.

They went in the direction they had last seen the black horse.

On, and on.

At last they struck the trail of the horse.

Then they pulled up.

"Look there!" shouted Dick.

He was the first to see the hoof-prints of the black horse.

As he saw them he shouted.

Tom glanced at the trail.

"What is this? As I live, Dick, the trail goes back!"

"Yes."

"The missionary has wheeled here and taken the back trail."

"Yes."

The two lads stood and looked into each other's faces.

They were silent for a moment.

Then Dick said:

"There are no tracks, save those of the black horse."

"No."

"That means the missionary has not been troubled by any one."

"So it does."

"We must conclude he turned back of his own free will."

"Yes."

"Is he mad?"

"I know not."

"Tom, this last mystery is one which caps the climax of all."

"It does."

"What shall we do?"

"We must follow the missionary. Remember the girl we mean to save is with him."

CHAPTER XII.

MAD MAN OR TRAITOR, WHICH?

"CAN it be the missionary has gone crazy, indeed?"

Dick made the remark, as he and Tom set out to follow the back trail of the black horse.

"I can think of no other explanation of his singular conduct."

"Nor I."

"Certainly it seems that, if in the possession of his normal senses, he would not carry Mollie back into peril."

"True."

"For he loves the girl."

"As a father."

"Yes, and he would be the last one to needlessly place her in danger, one would say."

"That is so. The old man has impressed me as being somewhat of a fanatic however."

"Regarding the subject of converting the Indians?"

"Yes."

"He gave me the same impression."

"Now one who becomes a man of one idea and buries himself from civilized people may become the victim of hallucinations easily, I shall say."

"If the missionary is insane I shudder for Mollie."

"And I."

"To be alone on these wild plains with a madman would be a terrible experience."

"For a young girl?"

"Yes."

"But one point more particularly perplexes me."

"And that is?"

"Why did Mollie not shout to us?"

"When the missionary turned back?"

"Yes."

"I confess I cannot explain that."

"Nor I."

"Certainly she would not wish to return among the Sioux."

"No, no."

"In reason then she should have cried out for help if in a moment of mania the missionary bore her toward her foes."

"Yes."

"It is all very strange."

"Extremely so."

"But we must know all."

"Yes, we will stick to the trail."

"Until we find Mollie?"

"Yes; now more speed."

"From the course of the trail, I think the missionary made for the great belt of timber yonder."

"Yes."

On and on the boys rode.

For a time they were silent.

Soon they came to the woods.

As they had anticipated, the trail of the black horse led into the timber.

Then it went north again.

The speed of the boy bicycle scouts was decreased in the woods.

They were obliged to go slower.

But, though the way was rather difficult at the beginning of the woods, as the young wheelmen advanced, it became less so.

More and more open grew the timber.

The surface between the great trees was level.

Soon the boy bicycle scouts were making good headway again.

The trail of the black horse still led north.

The hoof prints indicated the animal had been ridden at full speed.

"It looks as though the missionary was really seeking to run away from us," said Dick.

"That's so," replied Tom.

Just then Dick, who was in the lead, slowed up.

Tom saw him snatch a slip of paper from the bushes where it had lodged.

"What is it?" asked Tom.

He saw Dick's face pale as he scanned the paper.

For a moment Dick did not reply.

Tom repeated his inquiry.

Then Dick said:

"Listen!"

"Yes—yes."

Dick read two words that were scratched in pencil above Mollie's name on the slip of paper.

The words were as follows:

"Save me!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Tom. "Mollie threw that message down for us."

"Yes."

"She must know the missionary is mad."

"So it seems."

"He may ride right among the Indians."

"True."

"And before we can stop him Mollie may be in the hands of the renegade and old Satterlee, the arch conspirator."

"Yes—yes."

"Now let us ride as in a race for life."

"It is a race for life—Mollie's life!"

"I think so too."

The young wheelmen ceased talking.

Dick thrust the little slip of paper into the bosom of his bicycle blouse.

Then on again they went.

They seemed fairly to fly over the earth.

The great wheels made a "whirr" but that was the only sound that for some time, broke the silence.

It was a race of many miles that the boy wheelmen made.

Finally they came to a range of wooded hills.

Up these they went.

But the way was difficult.

The speed of the bicycle scouts was materially diminished.

Having reached the top of the hill, they looked down into a valley.

There a thrilling scene met their eyes.

They saw a great encampment of the Sioux.

The savages were assembled in force.

Having concealed their bicycles in a dense thicket, the boys crept along the hillside.

The trail of the black horse led down into the valley.

The lads doubted not that the missionary had ridden straight into the Indian camp.

It was now the object of the boy bicycle scouts to spy upon the Sioux camp.

They wished to learn whether or not the missionary and Mollie were really captives in the power of the redskins.

Dick said to Tom as they crept along:

"Look there, at the side of the big tepee, in the center of the camp!"

As he spoke he pointed.

A clump of bushes on a ledge now concealed the lads.

They peered down into the Sioux camp.

Both now saw Satterlee, the conspirator, and Delmart, the renegade, standing at the side of the great lodge Dick had indicated.

It was evident that the two villains were engaged in an earnest conversation.

The boys noticed, a moment later, that the great black horse, belonging to the missionary, was picketed near the great lodge.

When they discovered the horse Dick said:

"Now we may conclude it is positively settled that Mollie and the missionary are prisoners in the village, I think."

"Yes, and the question is how to rescue them."

"We must wait for night."

"And then?"

"Under cover of the darkness we will make a try to save them."

"Yes. Now let's seek a hiding-place."

The boys crept back.

They were soon in the heart of the dense thicket in which they had left their bicycles.

There they lay until night fell.

Just before the shadows became complete a dark form, unseen by the boys, crept along a ledge above them.

The stealthy spy was the missionary.
 He discovered the boys.
 Then he crept away.
 Not a sound made he.
 Down a pathway to the valley he went swiftly.
 Soon he entered the Indian village.
 Boldly he advanced to the great tepee, beside which the two lads had seen the renegade and Satterlee.
 The missionary, whom the boys now almost surely regarded as a madman, entered the great tepee.
 There Sitting Bull, Rain-in-the-face, and many other great chiefs were assembled.
 "Hal the white friend!"
 Thus exclaimed the head chief as the missionary entered.
 "Yes. And I have come with good tidings. The white boy scouts of the great shining wheels are hidden on the ledge above the valley."
 "Wah! then our warriors shall surprise them."
 "Yes," replied the missionary; "I have a plan to take the young wheelmen alive."
 "Say on."
 "Send with me a score of braves."
 "You shall have them."
 "I will conduct them by a circuitous route from the valley, so that the white spies may not see them until they are surrounded in the thicket."
 "Good!" assented the chief.
 "And I will go to the boys in the thicket and conduct them into the very hands of the Sioux braves."
 The chief assented.
 A few moments later the missionary and twenty braves crept out of the camp, made a detour, and stealthily approached the thicket.
 The missionary then went forward to lead the boys into a death trap. He evidently meditated the foulest treachery toward the lads. Was this the work of a madman?

CHAPTER XIII.

READING THE DISPATCH—EVERYTHING MADE CLEAR—CONCLUSION.

DICK and Tom, as the shades of night began to fall, discussed their plans as they lay hidden in the thickets.
 Presently the former said:
 "I have been thinking, Tom, that after all it may be my duty to open the sealed dispatch which Ford Arden intrusted to us for General Custer."
 "Why so?"
 "Because we may be captured."
 "Yes."
 "In that event the dispatch will be taken from us."
 "Yes."
 "And destroyed."
 "No doubt."
 "Suppose our lucky star should guide us to a way of escape after that?"
 "Ah, then we would be ignorant of the message."
 "And we could never acquaint General Custer with its contents."
 "That is so."
 "Now, under the present circumstances, do you not think I had best read the dispatch?"
 "Yes."
 "Then I will do so."
 Dick opened the leather bag and took out the dispatch.
 Tom watched him with interest as he opened the package.
 When the buckskin wrapper was removed a sheet of paper, such as might have been torn from a doctor's prescription book, was seen.
 It was covered with writing.
 Aloud Dick read the dispatch by the failing light of the dying day.
 It ran as follows:

"SITTING BULL'S VILLAGE.
 North Fork of the Yellowstone.
 May —, 18—.

"GENERAL GEORGE A. CUSTER,—This is to inform you that I am a prisoner in the hands of Sitting Bull. While out hunting in the moun-

tains I was caught in a snow storm, and I stumbled upon a camp of Sioux Indians. They made me a prisoner and carried me to Sitting Bull. I cured him of a serious illness. On account of my medical skill I am treated well, but it is meant by my captors that I shall never leave them. I implore you to come to my rescue.

"While among the Indians I have learned the great secret, as yet unknown to the whites, that the Black Hills are full of gold.

"Furthermore, I have learned that one Satterlee, a vile white renegade who has long dwelt among the Sioux, and ever urged them on to deeds of bloodshed, is engaged in a plot against the orphan children of my dear deceased brother, late of Helena.

"My late brother was a sort of religious fanatic. Some time ago Satterlee, the villainous renegade, under the name of Mr. Anthony, a missionary to the Sioux, and professing to be a most devout man, spent a winter in Helena. There he became great friends with my brother. When the latter died, Anthony induced him to enter a clause in his will that in the event of the death of his son and daughters before they came of legal age, the fortune should go to push missionary work among the Sioux, with Anthony, really Satterlee, as trustee of the fund. As the villain was also made the guardian of Ford and Mollie, he persuaded them to come to the Sioux country, to help him among the Indians he sought to convert. Really he meant to have the lad and maiden murdered that he might get their fortune. He has recently lived a double life. As Anthony, the missionary, he appears in a great white full beard and glasses, and he is otherwise wonderfully well disguised facially. No one would think that Good Anthony, the missionary, and Satterlee, the arch villain, are one and the same. Yet such I swear is the truth."

"Now, general, by the memory of our old friendship, I ask you to seek to capture the rascal, Satterlee, and save my brother's imperiled children.

"(Signed)

BARTON ARDEN, M. D."

Just as Dick finished reading the startling revelation of all the mystery, and just as he comprehended the pretended missionary was Mollie's worst enemy, Satterlee, still in the missionary rig, entered the thicket. Before he could speak Dick leaped at him and dealt him a blow with his gun that stretched him senseless.

When he came to his senses, Satterlee found himself bound and Dick astride of him with a pistol at his head.

At the point of the weapon, Dick compelled the villain to tell him in which lodge Mollie was a prisoner. When they had gained this information the boys gagged Satterlee and left him.

They crept down the mountain side.

Fortunately they eluded the Indians who were watching for Satterlee. Reaching the camp the boys led Mollie from it undetected in the darkness, though they had a narrow escape in passing the red sentinels.

The boys hastily explained all to Mollie, and she said that the pretended missionary who had duped them all so long had bound and gagged her when he bore her back among the Indians.

The lads did not venture to go back for their bicycles. But they secured three Indian ponies from a herd belonging to Sitting Bull. Well mounted the trio rode south.

An hour after leaving the Indian village they met a band of General Custer's scouts who had been sent out to look for the boys.

In safety the party reached the army of the Yellowstone, and the boys gave the general Dr. Arden's message, and also told the officer what they had discovered of the plans of the Indians.

Then they got leave to see Mollie safely to her friends in Helena. In due time the two boys and the young girl were safe among Mollie's friends.

Then came the news of the massacre of General Custer and his men which is a matter of history.

After all the warnings the boy bicycle scouts had given him the general had fallen into the death trap.

Some years later Mollie and Dick Dare were married, and at the same time Tom took unto himself a wife in the person of a beautiful girl who was Mollie's cousin.

About six months after the Custer massacre Dr. Arden escaped from the Indians and returned in safety to his home, and he stated he had shot and killed Satterlee when he escaped.

[THE END.]

PAUL BRADDON, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in THE WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 965, "The Prairie Post Boy; or, The Scalp Hunters of Apache Land." No. 961, "Eagle Dan the Boy Hermit of the Rockies." No. 955, "General Crook's Boy Guide; or, The Great Indian Fighter's Black Hills Trail." No. 948, "Pawnee Bill; or, The White Chief's First War Trail." No. 930, "Young Magic; or, The Boy With a Charmed Life." No. 921, "Wild Bill's Boy Partner; or, The Redskins' Gold Secret." No. 917, "Buffalo Bill's Boy Broncho Breaker." No. 909, "Velvet Van; or, Deadly Grip and His Demon Band." No. 892, "Satin Sam the Young Western Sport." No. 874, "A Boy Among the White Caps; or, A Victim of the Lash." No. 858, "Fearless Phil in Disguise; or, The Tiger's Last Plot." No. 834, "The Boy Stage Driver; or, The Hero of Rocky Pass." No. 828, "Kit Carson's Boy Scout." No. 818, "Fearless Phil's Chase." No. 812, "The Fur Hunters of Winnepeg." No. 802, "Fearless Phil; or, The Hero of Rugged Rift." No. 798, "The Young Snow Trailers; or, Big Track the Giant Moose Hunter." No. 786, "The 12 Owls; or, The Quaker City League." No. 773, "Dashing Dell, the Knight of the Knife; or, The Maniac Father."

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